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What, will you walk with me about the town?
— *Comedy of Errors.*

STREETS AND SLUMS.

A STUDY IN

LOCAL MUNICIPAL GEOGRAPHY.

(WITH MAPS.)

BY

FREDERICK J. BROWN.

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JUST as the growth and development of countries are determined to a great extent by their physical geography, the growth and development of cities depend largely upon what may be called their municipal geography, the laying out of the streets regularly or without regularity, the width and directions of the streets, and their distance apart.* Some cities, we all know, are laid out more regularly than others, most of our American cities aiming at great uniformity, one series of parallel streets being crossed at right angles by another series of parallel streets. While such regularity, or the absence of it, is a thing immediately obvious to the most careless observer, there is another respect in which cities differ from each other which is important, but not so obvious, indeed is very generally lost sight of, and only a few people who have studied the maps, and have done some measuring and figuring, know anything about it.

And that is the *wastefulness or economy of space* with which a city is laid out, the shape and size of the blocks, the proportion which the area of the streets bears to the area of blocks. Some cities are laid out very extravagantly. Washington is a familiar instance. There is no city in the world laid out on such an extravagant scale. The streets and avenues are so many and so wide, that the proportion of the total area of the city which they cover is much greater than in any other city. It is so expensively planned that under normal conditions the owners of real estate would probably be simply ruined by the cost of maintaining such a city, so great is the area of streets to be kept paved, cleaned, lighted and policed, to say nothing of the parks and reservations to be kept in order. But the general government has come to the rescue of the tax-payers, and bears half the expense of running the city. This is only right, for Washington is a

*Very much also depends, of course, upon the *grades* — good or bad — of the streets, but this a subject which it would not be within the scope of this pamphlet to discuss.

fancy article which it is a matter of pride to the people of the whole country to keep up as a show place, but it is obvious that that city affords no rule or analogy for other cities. Leaving Washington, it may be said that American cities generally are more liberally laid out than European cities as to the amount of street area, but there are considerable differences among them in this respect. In Philadelphia there is, I believe, a smaller proportion of streetage than in any other of our large cities, but I do not assert this as an ascertained fact.

Now between the two extremes of wastefulness as to space — streets too wide and too near together (making the blocks too small) —and undue economy—streets too narrow and too far apart (making the blocks too large) — there is somewhere a golden mean to be sought after. To illustrate the great differences in different cities in these regards, we may refer to the accompanying Map No. 1, where there is shown, with other blocks for purposes of comparison, an average up-town Baltimore block, *B*, which measures 320 feet by 150, and is bounded by three 66-foot streets and one 20-foot alley. If the whole city were laid out on this plan, the proportion of area of streets, including alleys, would be 35½ per cent. and of blocks 64½ per cent. On the same map there is shown an average up-town New York block, *A*, which measures 800 feet by 200,* and is bounded by 100-foot avenues and 60-foot streets, and if the whole city were laid out on that plan, the proportion of area of streets would be about 31½ per cent. and of blocks about 68½ per cent. In both cities the older, down-town,and business portions are divided up into smaller blocks, but these vary so much in size, and the streets run so irregularly, that it would be altogether too troublesome a task to make for either city even an approximate calculation as to the proportion of street area in the business portion generally. It is sufficient to say that there are parts of Baltimore, especially in the older portions of the city, which are cut up into little blocks much smaller than any to be found in New York, and in particular to notice the region shown on Map No. 3, Plat I. There we find — leaving out of consideration the large block at the corner of South and German Streets

*The blocks between Fifth and Sixth Avenues in New York are still larger, 920 feet by 200, nearly four times the size of the average Baltimore block. Blocks in Brooklyn are about the same as in New York.

— twenty-two blocks, the average size of which is only about 12,100 square feet, say one-fourth the size of the ordinary up-town block in Baltimore, or one-thirteenth the size of the New York up-town block, and the street-area is about 50 per cent. of the whole surface, leaving only one-half for the area of blocks. This way of laying out valuable land in the heart of the business portion of the city, is evidently very wasteful. It would not have been adopted by an individual or corporation trying to develop the property on business principles. The reader's attention will be invited again later to this region.

Returning to the more regularly laid out portions of New York and Baltimore, the New York up-town block of 160,000 square feet is, of course, three and one-third times as large as the Baltimore block of 48,000 square feet. Perhaps the New York block may be rather too large, probably the Baltimore block is too small, and certainly the depth of our blocks, 150 feet, is very badly chosen. On the same map, Map No. 1, is shown a block, *D*, which strikes a good average between the extremes of too large and too small. It is a block situated not in any distant city, but in that part of Baltimore, so to speak, which lies in Baltimore County, that is to say in Canton, just beyond the city limits. About sixty years ago the land of the Canton Company was laid out by Caspar Weaver, Surveyor, — so Mr. Martenet, our former City Surveyor, informs me — on a plan which seems on the whole a judicious one, and which is rather interesting by reason of the ingenuity shown in the selection of measurements. The blocks are each 458 feet by 204, the avenues are 70 feet wide and the streets 60 feet, so that ten blocks going north and south, and twenty blocks going east and west, make exactly one mile. The proportion of street area in a city laid out on this plan would be 33 per cent. and of blocks 67 per cent. It seems rather strange that so good a system as this, existing — on paper at least — at our very doors, should have been completely ignored, and that we should still have adhered to the old 150-feet-to-an-alley plan, as laid down on Poppleton's Plat.

But to return to our typical Baltimore block, it is evident that in the small depth of our blocks, and in the fact that one side bounds on a 20-foot alley, we have determining causes which have modified in an important way the development of our city. I tried to point this

out in a communication which I addressed to the *Sun* last summer, and which the *Daily Record* was so good as to think worth republishing with some words of approval. I will not go into the discussion of that subject here, further than to add this consideration, that probably the idea of laying out our lots with a depth of 150 feet to an alley was with the notion that this would suit very well for accommodating the stable which the owner might want to build on the rear of his lot, and that the alley-way would be convenient for the ingress and egress of servants. But most of the inhabitants of this, or of any other city, do not keep horses and carriages, nor maintain a troop of servants, and in laying out a city it is not possible to tell beforehand just where the very rich people are going to live, and I believe that all of those who have had much to do with real estate, or who have given any thought to the laying out of cities, are agreed that the plan of our Baltimore blocks, 150 feet to an alley, is — taking the whole city together — a bad one.* It is a bad enough plan in the city, it is still worse miles out in the country, where the city — I mean *built-up* city — will not reach for 100 years. Our rural boomers and developers who keep on laying out tracts with 66-foot streets and 20-foot alleys, ought to understand that a system of alleys out in the country is a glaring absurdity, and that such a "street" is a thing neither of beauty nor utility; that it is much too wide, that a lane about 35 feet wide (and all the better if it is not perfectly straight, but follows a winding course along the valley, or the line of least elevation) is altogether preferable, to say nothing of the valuable land wasted by the unnecessary street (or road) area. Two years ago Mr. Gustav W. Lurman, of Catonsville, in an address delivered in Baltimore County, gave some very good advice about laying out roads, criticising the wide and straight avenues as "blots upon the landscape" in the neighborhood of Baltimore, a region which nature has done so much to make beautiful, and I feel tempted to quote from him, or to follow the line of his remarks, but it is a subject of too much importance to be treated of here, and in this merely incidental way.

*When some 15 square miles of territory were added to the city a few years ago, a competent commission ought to have been appointed at once, to prepare and submit plans for the proper laying out of the annexed districts. The work could have been done then much more completely than it can now, but it would be better to begin now than not at all.

But next; — is it not the fact that a neighborhood can be laid out on some exceptionally bad plan, so badly indeed that no good improvements will ever be built there? It certainly is the fact, and it is certain that we have in Baltimore some such neighborhoods, condemned by their malformation to be mere slums, a nuisance in themselves and to some extent a blight upon property for a considerable distance around. When such a piece of stupidity was perpetrated as the laying out East and Chesnut Streets only 72 feet apart, it might have been foreseen that that would become a neighborhood of vile slums, and would so remain indefinitely. It was not because Douglass Street stopped short before it reached Exeter street; it was not because there were *too few streets running east and west*, but because there was *one street too many running north and south*, that this got to be such a squalid and disreputable locality. This was pointed out in editorial articles in the *News* and *American*, published two years ago and more, when the common-sense of the community was trying in vain to assert itself against the common-council-sense which in 1884 undertook to saddle upon the tax-payers a culpable piece of extravagance.

A little study of the map ought to have shown the Mayor and City Council when they passed that Douglass Street opening ordinance, avowedly for the benefit of East Baltimore, that turning the site of Odd Fellows Hall into a "Plaza" was not going to rid us of the slums. Something very different was needed to improve them out of existence, and Mayor Davidson adopted the correct view of the situation in his first message to the City Council, and again when in April 1890, he urged upon the Committee on Highways, that instead of spending half a million of dollars upon the Douglass Street improvement (at least half of that sum being simply wasted), they should, at an outlay of one sixth of the money, or less, demolish the long narrow block between East and Chesnut Streets and make one wide parked place where the two streets now are He returned to the subject in his message of January 26, 1891, as follows:

"The Douglass Street opening does not really bring the relief needed in a section of the City which is most neglected, and the condition of which is absolutely disgraceful. I refer to the section lying between Aisquith and Exeter Streets, north of Fayette Street and south of Low Street.

"The way to improve this section is by spending money judiciously, right there on the spot, and not by tearing down costly buildings a third of a mile distant. Forrest Street should be opened through to Fayette Street, at the corner of Comet Alley, instead of ending, as it now does, in a crooked, unpaved alley. . . .

"But a more important and radical measure is, I think, needed. An examination of this part of the City will show that all of this region was permanently injured by the singular mistake which was made in laying out East and Chesnut Streets only 72 feet apart. On the lots between these streets, averaging only 36 feet in depth, no decent improvements have been or ever will be made, and the houses built on the opposite sides of the streets, that is to say on the east side of East Street and the west side of Chesnut, are also most miserable and squalid, reflecting the character of the houses which face them, although the depth of the lots on the east side of East Street and the west side of Chesnut Street, is such that improvements of a good class might be built upon them.

"After much reflection, it has seemed to me that the only cure for this state of things is to condemn and tear down all the houses between East and Chesnut Streets, from Fayette Street northwardly to a point (about 147 feet from Douglass Street), where the two streets diverge, and become far enough apart to admit of decent improvements being built upon them. I should not recommend this merely for the sake of getting rid of the disreputable houses which disgrace this neighborhood, if there were any probability that the property thereabouts might ever be better improved either for residence or business purposes. But it is impossible that any good improvements will be put up there while the streets remain as now laid out. It is a great misfortune that the streets were laid out on this absurd plan, and it is only through action on the part of the City that the mistake can be rectified.

"The new street thus made will be about 162 feet wide, about the width of Eutaw Place, and it should be parked with trees and grass plots down the middle, like Eutaw Place or Broadway. It would then constitute so handsome an improvement as to materially enhance the value of property, and insure the speedy erection of an entirely different class of improvements in that locality. But even if this increase of values should not occur, the City owes it to itself to do away with the miserable slums which now exist there, because the Douglass Street opening will cause a wide avenue to pass through, and expose to the gaze of the public, what before was comparatively out of the way and hidden. It may not be sound public policy for the City to embark in the business of buying out slums, but here is an eye-sore and a hideous offense to the moral sense of the community.

"The cost of this improvement will be much less than might be supposed. The total assessed value of all the property to be thus condemned and destroyed is about $80,000, the property consisting of some ninety-five

dwellings of the average value (for house and lot) of only about $850, and no doubt a considerable part of the expense will be made up from the benefits to be assessed upon property on the improved and widened street.

"The substance of these suggestions was embodied in a communication which I addressed on April 11, 1890, to the City Council Committee on Highways, and further reflection on the subject has convinced me of the urgent need of this measure of relief to a section of the City which ought to be very different from what it is.

"The preliminary notice of an intention to apply for such an ordinance has already been published, and I trust the Council will concur with me as to the desirability of the improvement. Preliminary notice for the proposed opening of Forrest Street has also been published. A study of the map, or an examination of the locality, will show that the closing of the westernmost end of Half-Moon Alley, and also the westernmost end of Comet Street, is needed to complete the proposed improvements, and preliminary notices, accordingly, have already been inserted in two of the daily newspapers."

I prepared, at Mayor Davidson's request, the four ordinances which he recommended, and they were passed by the City Council, and approved on May 25th and 27th, 1891. They are known as numbers 95, 96, 97 and 105.*

* When this pamphlet was nearly ready for the press, my attention was called by Mr. Martenet to an ordinance of the Mayor and City Council, approved June 6, 1890, by which the name of East Street was changed to Rogers Avenue. Evidently at the date of his message to the City Council above quoted, Mayor Davidson had forgotten this change of name, and I must confess that I had never heard of it when the preliminary notice of the ordinance — No. 95 of 1891 — was published, and when the ordinance itself was passed, and no doubt the members of the City Council who passed the ordinance, had also forgotten, or were ignorant of the change of name. I am quite willing to bear, with them, my share of the blame for this very pardonable lack of information, or my share of the joke upon us, if it is a large enough one to go round among so many. If the fact had been borne in mind, the preliminary notice, and the ordinance, would have mentioned the street as "Rogers Avenue, until recently known as East Street," but I hardly think the failure to mention the brand-new name, which it seems not even the Mayor and City Council had got familiar with, will affect the validity of the ordinance. But what a characteristic specimen this is of our absurd fashion of making changes, utterly uncalled for, and generally for the worse, in the names of streets. Rogers *Avenue!* As if this poor little street, and the slums through which it runs, were going to be dignified and improved, or the property enhanced one cent per foot in value, by such a change of name. There is too much of this "avenue" foolishness. In the city, "street" is a much better word; "lane" or "road" are much better in the country. Think of the picturesque "Rolling Road" in Baltimore County having its name changed to "Catonsville Avenue," of "Republican Street," the name of which was an offence to the democratic city government of 1874, changed to "Carrollton Avenue," — it had borne its "Republican" name for generations, and when that was the

The "slums region" as it now is, is shown on Map No. 2, Plat I, and as it will be, after these ordinances are carried into effect, on Map No. 2, Plat II. I think no one will dispute Mayor Davidson's view that the moderate outlay required will be more than justified by the great improvement which will result.*

But there is a further improvement — a very great one — which could be made at slight expense, and, I think, ought to be made. That is to extend the parking north-westwardly between the two streets, and let it expand into a small park or square bounded on the north-west by Low Street. Map No. 2, Plat III, shows this proposed improvement of the slums region. A good deal of the additional area to be taken by the plan which I now suggest, is unimproved, and where it is built upon, the improvements are very poor, and all of the land itself is of but little value on account of the wretched slums in its neighborhood. The welcome oasis of green, nearly three acres in extent, thus gained for the public, would be a good thing in itself, and would greatly benefit surrounding property in all directions. To condemn and demolish valuable business property in the heart of the city, and turn it into a public square, seems to me to be unwise. A square, or park, so situated costs a great deal more, and does much less

designation of what is now the democratic party, — of "Adams Street," (perhaps because the Adamses were Yankee Presidents), changed in 1870 to "Harlem Avenue," of "Sharp" (it should have been "Sharpe Street") changed to "Hopkins Place," of "Chatsworth Street," changed to "Myrtle Avenue," of "North Street," changed to "Guilford Avenue," etc., etc. The name of North *Street* should have been let alone, and North *Avenue*, with its two names of East North Avenue and West North Avenue, might well have been changed to Boundary Avenue, or some other name. West Street also, in its two contradictory or reduplicated forms, of East West Street and West West Street, should have had some other name bestowed upon it. But just those streets whose names were good enough already were selected for change. Even our old friend Chesnut Street has had its name, *west of Gay Street*, changed to Colvin Street. We are still away behind the city of Mexico in this matter of different local names for one and the same street, for there a street takes a new name with every new block, which must be rather a strain on the memory.

*It may perhaps be doubted whether it would not have been better to make the southern extension of the widened Forrest Street, stop at Comet Street, leaving Comet Alley as it is, which probably would be a sufficient southern outlet for the very small amount of travel which will ever come down Forrest Street. The extension all the way to Fayette Street, however, although perhaps unnecessary, will not have added very much to the cost of a greatly needed improvement.

good, than a square, or park, in regions where people *live*. For this reason the project, once favored by our present (and several times former) Mayor, of making a public square out of the land opposite the City Hall and running through to Gay Street, was, I think, most injudicious. Part of this scheme has gone into effect. The people in their wisdom (as represented by the city authorities) decided to have a little "Plaza" of paving stones where Odd Fellows Hall stands, but it is to be hoped that they will content themselves with the extravagance thus far perpetrated without also tearing down Holliday Street Theatre and Pepper's Hotel to complete this cyclone style of improving the city. "That is the way to lay the city flat," and at the same time to flatten out the citizens' pocket-books. Grass and trees will grow just as well on a cheap lot as on a dear one, and the cheapest site for a park anywhere between the City Hall and Aisquith Street is just the one which I have mentioned above.

Now for another slums-neighborhood, small and unimportant compared with the one just considered. Between Lexington and Fayette Streets there are two little alleys, New Church Street and Goodwin Alley, about 18 feet and 15 feet wide, I believe, running parallel with each other from Crooked Lane to Sharp Street, and *only 42 feet apart*. A region consequently which was just cut out for slums, and sure enough, a very pronounced case of disreputable and disorderly slums developed itself there. Fortunately, as a result of the increased value of Lexington Street property, the large stores built on the south side of that street have been extended southwardly until they have at last fairly *built out* some of the objectionable houses. But that miserable little "block", only 42 feet in width and utterly incapable of decent improvement, remains as originally laid out. It ought without delay to be "improved off the face of the earth"—as the Yankee said of the French Canadians—and as follows: By closing Goodwin Alley and widening New Church Street on the south side to say 25 feet in all. The lots on the north side of Fayette street would then have a depth of *about* 145 feet to the alley (New Church Street), and it is probable that before many years valuable warehouses and stores fronting on Fayette Street would cover the whole of this depth, just as many of the stores on Lexington Street have already been extended back to

the alley. Or perhaps a better arrangement would be to condemn say 12 feet in width of the northernmost part of New Church Street —which would virtually be to add so much to the depth of the Lexington Street lots, now 120 feet deep, —and to lay out as a *new* New Church Street, a 25-foot alley 132 feet distant from Lexington Street. This would leave about 133 feet as the *average* depth of the lots running back northwardly from Fayette Street. Either plan would be an improvement over existing conditions, but as to the question which plan is best, I leave that to those more interested than I am, to decide. Let some "other fellow walk the floor." *

Just here its may be worth while to mention that when that monumental piece of folly, the Hanover Street opening ordinance, was passed by the Mayor and City Council in 1874, one of the arguments by which it was attempted to justify the opening northwardly to Mulberry Street, at an enormous cost, was that thus we could "purify the slums" and "let in the light of day" upon the little Whitechapel which New Church Street then was, just as the promoters of the Douglass Street folly contended that by widening a 50-foot *cross-street* to a 70-foot avenue the larger Whitechapel of East and Chesnut Streets was going to be improved into decency. In both cases the remedy was in absurd disproportion to the disease, and was based upon a mistaken diagnosis.

But enough, for the present, of these unsavory slums. Let us now take a look at what may be called our business slums, a small region fortunately but which lies in the heart of the business portion of town. The district referred to is in that part of the city which is shown on Map No. 3, Plat I; but before turning our attention to the particular place in question, it may be interesting to note how it was that all that part of town came to be so badly laid out. That there are too many streets there, is evident enough, but the

*In the year 1878 this New Church Street child of wrath was re-christened, and started upon a career of respectability by the name of Wyoming Street,—perhaps because fair Wyoming was "on Susquehanna's side," and Susquehanna means "crooked river," and this street runs out from Crooked Lane. Possibly through a hope that the Magdalens of the neighborhood might be converted into Gertrudes. At least, if these were not the reasons, I do not know what were It is a very good name, but it was a pity to waste it upon this forlorn little alley. I mention the fact here by way of a warning note to any interested or public spirited persons who may think of having passed some such ordinance as I have indicated above.

fact is not so well-known that some of them were not originally laid out *as streets*. Three of them, Ellicott Street, Hollingsworth Street and Cheapside, *used to be docks*, running north from the Basin — the Cheapside dock running all the way to Water Street, the other two not extending so far north, — until by an Act of Assembly, passed in 1818, they were closed and filled in as streets, and Pratt Street became the northernmost boundary of the Basin and remaining docks. It is a great many years since not — "a river flowed on through the vale of Cheapside," if I may quote here Wordsworth's line, — but since a sluggish tide rose and fell there, and only a few of our oldest inhabitants can remember those docks of long ago, whose former existence explains the curious plan of *over-streeting* shown in that region.

And now for the particular spot which has suffered most from this faulty arrangement. If one goes southwardly along Calvert Street, he will find that all the way from Lombard to Pratt Street he has on his left a row of very poor brick buildings, perhaps about a hundred years old. The reason why the property has remained in this undeveloped condition, is perfectly obvious. *The lot is only 34 feet deep!* By a most unwise arrangement of streets, we have Calvert Street laid out 60 feet wide, and Cheapside 65 feet wide, west and east of this long and absurdly narrow block. The shorter block between Lombard and Water Streets has the same small depth, but, for the very reason that it is a short and not a long block, the improvements erected upon it are of much better character than those upon the block south of Lombard Street, which is 380 feet long.

It is very obvious that here we have too much street and too little block, and also that most of the property between Calvert Street and Cheapside from Lombard to Pratt Street will never be decently improved unless some radical alteration is made in the arrangement of the streets.

Now, what should that alteration be? One plan would be simply to close Cheapside from Lombard to Pratt Street. By this plan 24,700 square feet would be gained, but the lots from Calvert Street to Bowly Street (which is only 20 feet wide) would be 165 feet deep, and this is no doubt a rather greater depth — *to an alley* — than is generally desirable for business purposes. It is, however, to be

borne in mind that the block on the east side of Sharp Street, south of Lombard (shown on Map No. 1), is still deeper, 222 feet to an alley, and that in spite of this depth — or because of this depth, I will not attempt to say which — it has lately been improved by some of the finest warehouses ever built in Baltimore. Whether the kind of trade which has sought, or will seek, South Calvert Street, needs very deep lots or rather shallow lots, let those who are more familiar than I am with the subject decide. But, again, the property on the east side of Cheapside running back to Bowly Street, is improved by valuable buildings, and the plan of closing Cheapside would involve the payment of such heavy damages for this property that probably it ought not to be adopted. If there is a reasonable probability that within a few years very fine warehouses would be built covering the whole depth from Calvert Street to Bowly Street, then this plan, although so costly, might be justifiable; if not, not. Let that be settled by the opinions of those who know most about the kind of trade which belongs to that neighborhood, and its demands. So far as I can form an opinion on the subject, I should say that the possibility of improvement would by no means justify the certainty of very heavy expense.

Without closing Cheapside then, is there any other way in which this shallow and forlorn-looking block between Calvert Street and Cheapside, south of Lombard Street, can be made capable of decent improvement? I would suggest the following plan: to make Calvert street south of Lombard Street a 45-foot street (15 feet narrower than it now is) and Cheapside a 40-foot street (25 feet narrower than it now is), and by thus adding to the narrow lot 40 feet taken from the beds of those two streets, to make a lot 74 feet deep, which would be a tolerably good lot for business purposes. The Chamber of Commerce building stands on a lot only a very little deeper than this lot would be. By this plan (see Map No. 3, Plat II), there would be gained 15,200 square feet, and what is more important, the lots which are now covered by shanties — those poor old brick buildings hardly deserve any better name — would very soon be covered by fine stores or warehouses. As to the mere value of the land gained, if land thereabouts is worth about $5 per square foot — as to which I can only make a vague conjecture — then the area to be thus saved by narrowing the streets would of itself be worth

$76,000, less of course expenses and damages. But the main point is not what the city would get from the sale of land, but the greatly improved character of the buildings which would be put up there, the taxable basis of the city being thus largely increased.

Perhaps a word should be added here as to a legal question which would seem to be raised by the plan which I have suggested to make Calvert Street 15 feet narrower, and Cheapside 25 feet narrower. The city has the power (Public Local Laws, Article IV, Section 806) "to provide for laying out, opening, extending, widening, straightening, or closing up in whole or in part, any street, square, lane or alley, within the bounds of said city," and whether the power to *close up in whole or in part*, extends to the *narrowing* of a street, may perhaps not be free from doubt. Another doubt may be raised whether, supposing that *a street* may be made narrower, *two streets* may by one and the same ordinance, *both* be made narrower so as to enlarge the lot lying between, and whether, again, the passage of *two* ordinances might not be attended with difficulties. Perhaps the present experienced law officers of the city, or some of their predecessors in office, may have had occasion to consider these questions, as to which I do not here propose to volunteer an opinion.* If the plan of enlarging the block by narrowing the two streets be beyond the city's powers, it can of course be accomplished through an Act of Assembly. Legislation on a much larger scale was applied for and obtained (Act of 1834, chapter 81) when the "Poppleton's Plat" arrangement of streets and alleys over some 100 acres in the city — the Mount Clare property belonging to the late James Carroll — was done away with, so as to permit of a more judicious laying out of the streets.

No doubt, there will be opposition to one of the plans which I have suggested for changing this Cheapside-Calvert Street neighborhood, on the ground that 40-foot and 45-foot streets are too narrow, that it would "injure" Calvert Street and Cheapside to be narrowed by the 15 and 25 feet taken off. But width of streets should be viewed as a means, not as an end. By keeping the streets wide, the intervening property is ruined, by narrowing them it will be greatly

*A somewhat similar question might be raised *a propos* of one of the New Church Street plans suggested above.

improved, and property on the west side of Calvert Street will feel and reflect the improvement; — will be more valuable when it faces fine warehouses, across a 45-foot street, than now when it stands opposite to such poor buildings across a 60-foot street. Similarly as to property on the east side of Cheapside. When we remember that business of hundreds of millions of dollars is transacted in the narrow streets of London and Boston, when we recall the fact that Light Street and Lexington Street, west of Charles, are only 40 feet wide, and West German Street and Commerce Street less than that, no further argument on this point ought to be needed. A 45-foot or even a 40-foot street, is wide enough to accommodate a very large and flourishing business, especially if — as is the case with Cheapside and South Calvert Street — it is *not encumbered with car-tracks.*

It may seem paradoxical to say so, but it is nevertheless the fact that a 40-foot street in Baltimore is narrower than a 40-foot street in Boston, or doubtless than in other cities which could be named, the explanation being that here we allow greater intrusions upon the sidewalk in the matter of door-steps, cellar-ways and *shop-fronts*, than would be allowed in most other large cities. In crowded streets like our 40-foot Lexington Street, or our 50-foot Gay Street, shop-fronts should not be allowed to protrude at all, but everything should be kept back rigorously to the building line, leaving the whole space clear for travel and traffic. Of course when Cheapside is narrowed to 40 feet, the existing side-walk on the east side should be made narrower than it now is, and if possible, all telegraph poles should be banished from the street.

It may be objected that there seems to be some inconsistency between the position which Mayor Davidson took, that the 72-foot block between East and Chesnut Streets is incapable of decent improvement, and my suggestion that the Calvert Street block should be widened to 74 feet, so that a good class of improvements may be built there, but there is no real inconsistency. Mayor Davidson was dealing with a *residence* portion of the town — if one may so speak of that wretched locality — while we are now considering the heart of the business section. Blocks will do very well for stores which would be altogether too small for *two* rows of good *dwellings.*

There is another neighborhood, not a business locality this time, to which attention might be called. When Park Street was opened

northwardly some years ago, an unsightly wedge-shaped triangle, quite incapable of decent improvement, was left between Park Street and Fulton Alley, north of Tyson Street, and there it has remained, a hindrance to the development of neighboring property. The alley ought to be closed from Tyson Street northwardly. About 220 feet of frontage on Park Street would thus be gained, and before many years good buildings would be put up there.

And now I take leave of this not very interesting examination of particular localities, where, as I have tried to show, a whole neighborhood can be seriously injured, and perhaps remain for generations in an undeveloped condition, because of its faulty laying out. Other instances can be found, plenty of them no doubt, but two of those which I have given are among the most conspicuous. What has been shown leads, I think, to these two conclusions. 1st. That a neighborhood can be more seriously and *permanently* injured by too much street than by having too few streets; more by chopping up into too small blocks, than by leaving the blocks too large — a truth which the professional street openers of Baltimore would do well to heed — and 2dly, that if our Mayors and City Councilmen would turn their best attention to improvements such as I have pointed out, there would be "millions in it" for the city. Building exhibition halls, or two-million-dollar Court-houses, getting up trades displays, or sending the finest possible — or the most fantastic — "exhibit" to the Chicago Fair, will not "boom" or "advertise," or advance the city one-half so well as attending to its proper development and laying out, — correcting, where it is practicable, mistakes made in the older parts of town, and avoiding them in the new parts.

Swift said that whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together. With but slight change — for in the city we do not want to raise a large grass crop in the streets, but we do want to see finer improvements put up — this would be good doctrine for the average city-councilman to lay to heart. If he will try to rectify — *when it can be done at small expense* — ill planned localities where only shanties can stand now, but where good dwellings or warehouses can and will be

built after the changes are made, he will have deserved better of his city, than by years spent in scrambling for his share of lamplighters and garbagemen, and all the patronage of "peanut politics."

There is one very serious consideration to which of course due weight must be given whenever the question comes up of the advisableness of condemning property for public use, and that is the excessive value which owners put upon their property, and the excessive damages which their eloquent attorneys claim before a jury when condemnation cases are tried. But admitting that there is a great danger, amounting almost to a certainty, that the city will have to pay more than it is worth for the property it takes, while this ought to be a controlling reason against ill contrived and unnecessary street openings, it ought not to stand in the way of a public improvement which is not too costly and which is urgently needed, and if it can be shown that it will certainly result in a great enhancement of values.

Before taking leave of this subject, I may perhaps be allowed to recall the history of the Hanover Street opening ordinance of 1874, and of its repeal, although in doing so I mention my own connection with the matter. When the ordinance to open this street all the way to Mulberry Street was passed, not one of the daily papers came out against this piece of wasteful extravagance. About half a million dollars — to make a necessarily vague, but I think a very moderate estimate — would have been wasted, and worse than wasted (for the property not destroyed would have been left, much of it, incapable of decent improvement), but not a word of protest was uttered. Fortunately Mr. W. M. Laffan, the very able editor of a weekly paper, the *Bulletin*, then published here, and long since discontinued (and who is more widely known through his connection later with *Harper's Monthly*, and now with the New York *Sun*) became interested in the subject, and thought that the saving of so much money and property was not beneath the notice of his newspaper. Two communications — or articles, I forget which — in opposition to the projected street opening appeared in the *Bulletin*. They produced absolutely no effect. I need feel no hesitation about saying so, for I wrote them myself. Some time afterwards Mr. Laffan and I talked the matter over, and we agreed that another attempt should be made, that the articles should be republished, condensed, *with a map*, which he was to

supply. Within a few days the map had — I will not say *converted* public opinion, for no one seemed to think or care anything about the subject before, but — *created* a very strong public opinion, which was reflected in the daily press, and demanded the repeal of the ordinance. Mr. H. Rozier Dulany, who was then in the City Council, interested himself very warmly in the movement, and introduced and promptly put through the repealing ordinance.

In the same way the Douglass Street folly went unrebuked of the press, and almost unnoticed of the people, until the *News*, in April 1889, published a *map* showing how the taxpayers' money was being wasted (for the map and accompanying articles showed, to a demonstration, that the street opening could be made by a straighter route for about one-half the money), whereupon a very powerful public sentiment formulated itself, many of our best citizens, among them Messrs. Enoch Pratt, Andrew Reid, J. Hall Pleasants, Henry James, John Curlett, Joseph Friedenwald, and Douglas H. Thomas, — as a matter of public spirit and not because their own property was affected — protested against the scheme, and the *American* took strong ground editorially against it. I have little doubt that if the movement had begun earlier the project would have been defeated.

Now from this there are one or two lessons to be learned. One is that while our people are very apathetic in resisting any street-opening raid upon the city's treasury, they will sometimes act when they see the point, and that the way to open their eyes is to *publish a map* of the premises. A second lesson, a corollary from this, is that the law ought to be changed so as to require that as soon as the preliminary notice of any street opening is published, a map showing the property to be condemned — say on a scale of not less than 50 feet to an inch — shall be prepared and put on file in the Street Commissioners' office. If it were also required that a map, on a smaller scale, should be published in one of the newspapers with the preliminary notice, this would be a still better protection to the taxpayer. As it is, he gets left; he is the "forgotten man" all the time. His position, which was bad enough before, was made worse by a recent decision of the Court of Appeals. The law requiring that before a street-opening ordinance shall be passed, "at least sixty days' notice shall be given of any application for the passage of such ordinance, in at least two of the daily newspapers,"

the Court held that *one* insertion of the notice in the two newspapers is enough.

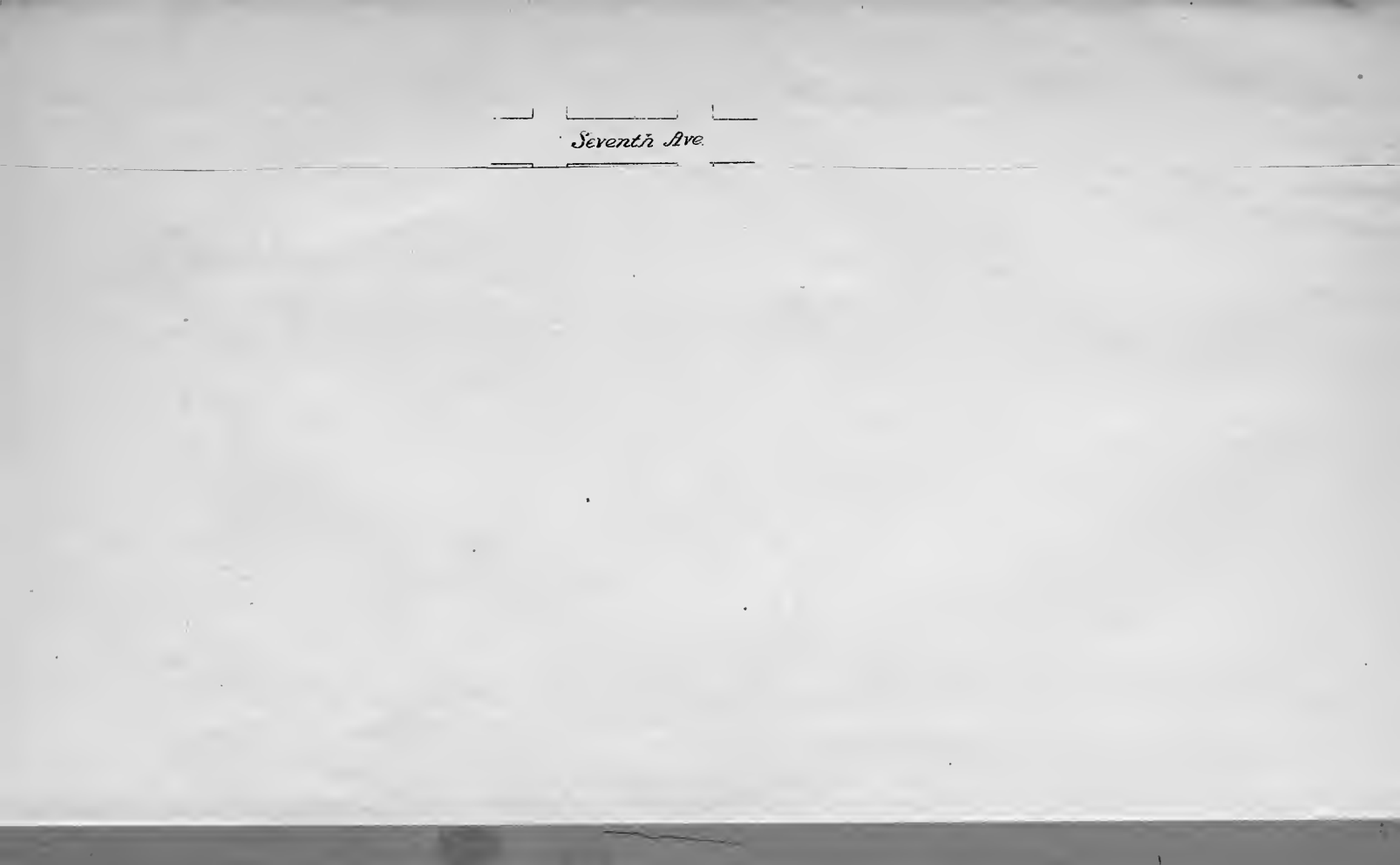
It would be a mistake to suppose that a foolish street-opening project is necessarily and always a *job*, as it sometimes is, of the anonymous promoters of it. Such projects are often favored by sensible men, good citizens, who simply do not understand the subject, and the ordinances may be passed in good faith by City Councilmen, and approved by Mayors, who, without a map before them, with no exact knowledge of the locality, and with no sort of estimate of the cost, really do not know how they are wasting the people's money.

In his message already quoted from, Mayor Davidson said: "In the matter of street openings, in my opinion, the law should be changed so as to require the legal advertisement of the purpose to make such application to be signed by several responsible persons, and preceded by an elaborate survey, with a full description of the proposed opening, accurately made, so as to thoroughly inform the public, and prevent the consummation of schemes which benefit private property almost wholly at the expense of the City." If Mayor Latrobe had had before him in 1884 the map which the *News* published five years later, showing how a quarter of a million dollars could be saved in the Lexington-Douglass-Street opening, and the destruction of Odd Fellows Hall avoided, he might have taken the same view which Mayor Davidson so strongly held, that here was a good deal of money being thrown away.

Until our city government becomes more vigilant in watching and scotching, or killing, these extravagant street openings, and until the law is changed so as to require the publication of ample notice, with filing of *maps*, would it not be well for some of our newspapers to make it their business to protect the community in this respect. It used to be a joke among journalists, that one of the great dailies of Chicago had a "snake-editor" on its staff, and the name seems to suggest a department to which some one of our reporters might, with no discredit to himself and with much advantage to the public, be assigned; — that of watching the columns of the different newspapers for preliminary notices of street-openings, and getting up the maps to be published in his newspaper (which would always attract attention) to show the unwary or unimaginative reader just what the alleged improvement is going to be,

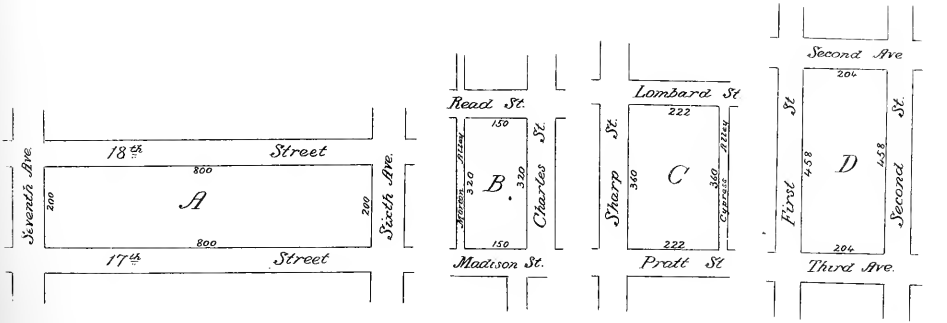
— a diagram, as it were, to explain the poor joke about to be perpetrated in the City Hall at the taxpayers' expense. It is a place where economy is not generally the favorite watch-word. If our municipal legislators remember Artemus Ward's famous advice: "Always live within your income, even if you have to borrow money to do it," it is the latter half, not the first half of that Delphic utterance, which they lay most to heart. If some one of our newspapers were to take up regularly the role of watch-dog of the city's treasury, it would earn and receive the thanks of a large part of the community.

I take pleasure in expressing my obligations to Mr. Simon J. Martenet, formerly our City Surveyor, who takes a public spirited interest in matters connected with the city's improvement and welfare, and has very kindly supplied me with the maps which this pamphlet contains. I am glad to be able to quote him as approving, in the main, my suggestions as to what ought now to be done in the localities which have been treated of in some detail.


Seventh Ave.

Map No. 1.

Scale, 300 feet to one inch.



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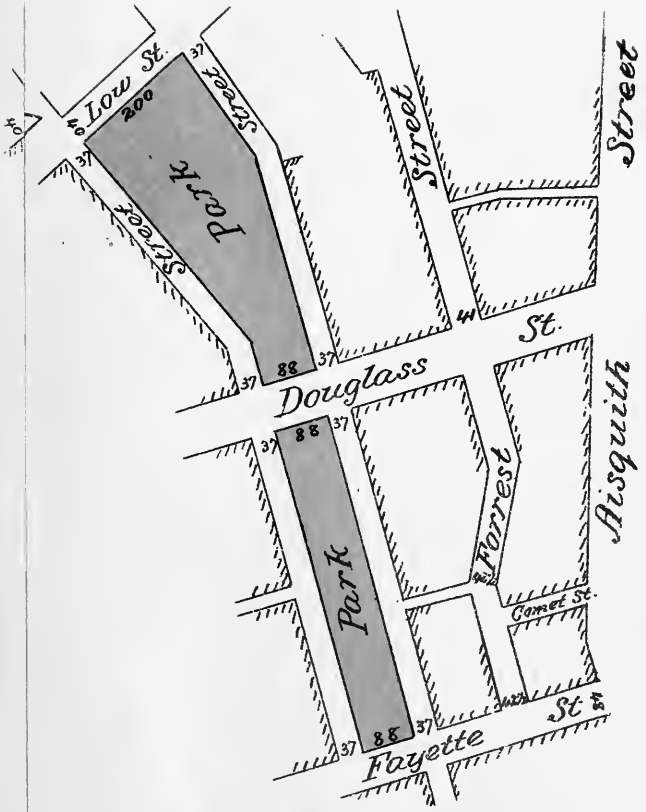

Plat :— III

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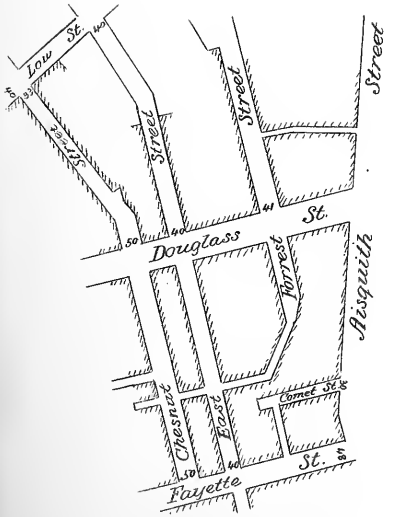
Map No. 2.

Scale: 300 feet to one inch.



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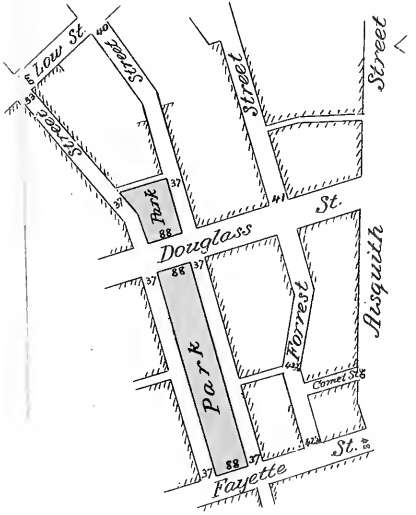

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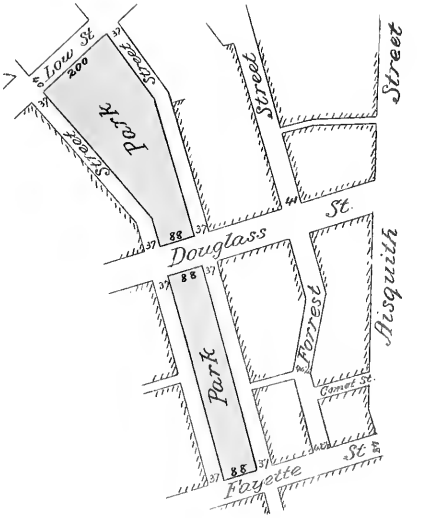

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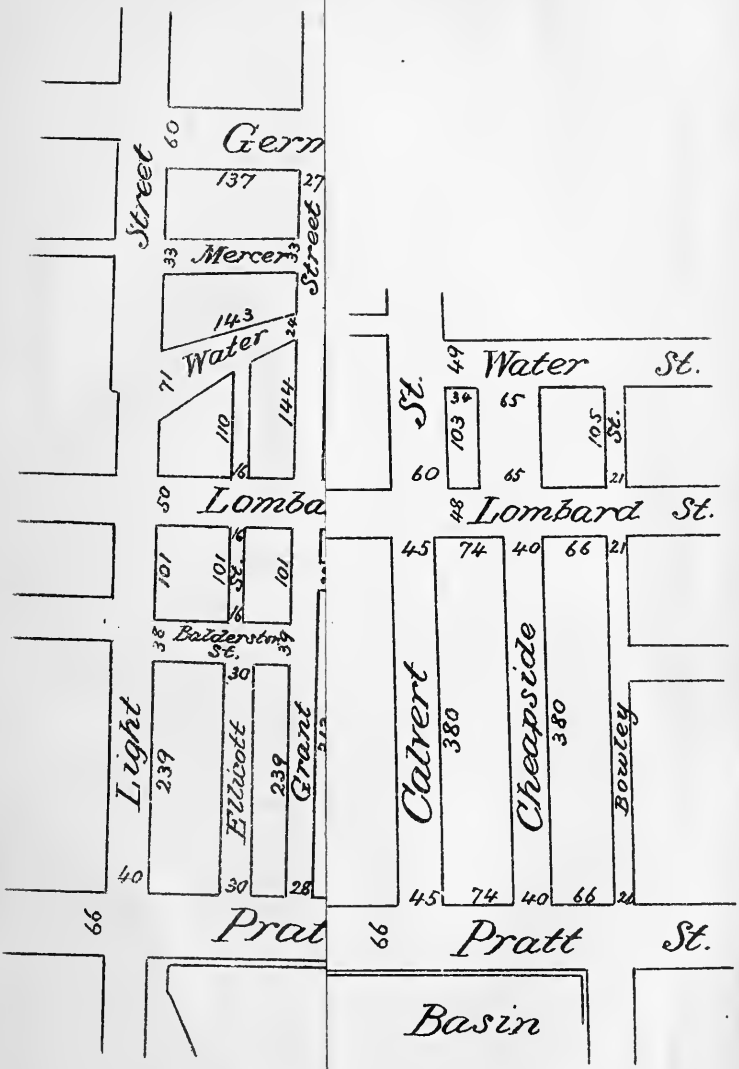
No. 3.

200 Feet to one inch.



Plat :— II.

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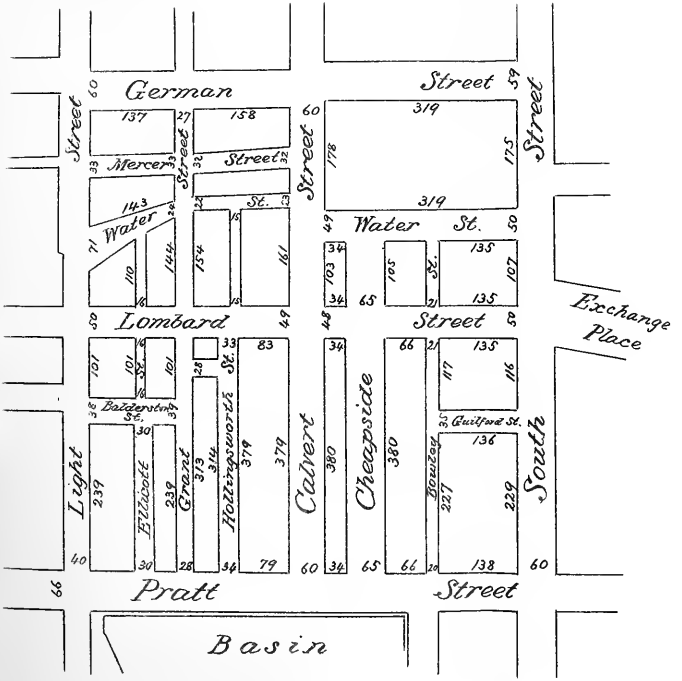
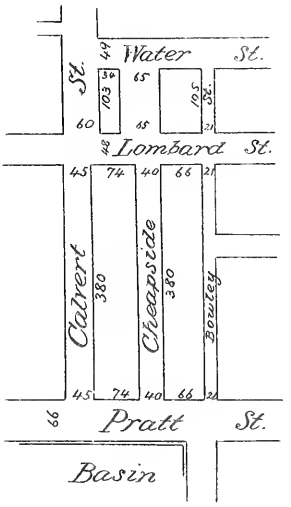
Map No. 3.

Scale: 200 Feet to one inch.



Plat:— I.



Plat:— II.

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— *Comedy of Errors.*

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